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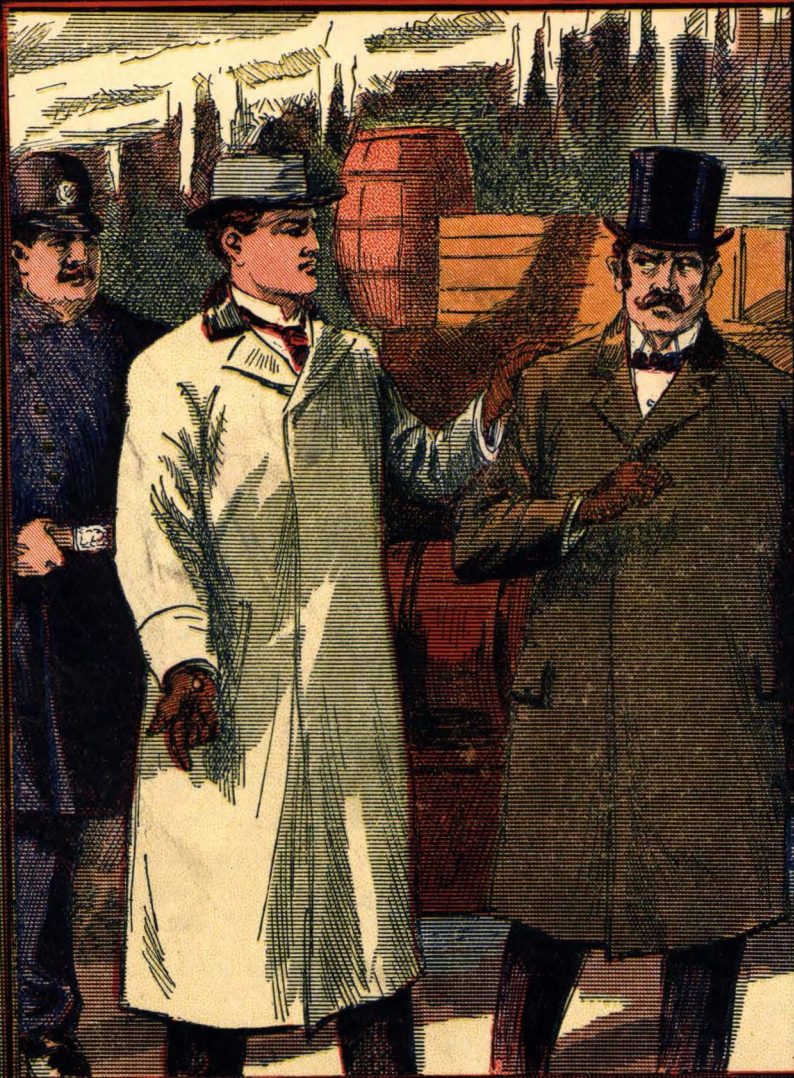


THE NOTE-BOOKS OF
OF POLICE

A FROZEN CLUE

or The Cold Storage Mystery

BY ALDEN F. BRADSHAW



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SHIELD WEEKLY

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A Frozen Clew; OR, THE COLD STORAGE MYSTERY.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

AN ICY TOMB.

"Did you send for me, Chief Watts?" asked Sheridan Keene, hurriedly entering the former's private office about nine o'clock one morning last December. "Garratt said you wanted me."

Chief Watts glanced up from the telephone, at which he still was engaged.

"So I do, Inspector Keene!" he exclaimed, gravely. "There is a shocking affair at the Atlas Cold Storage. You had better go right there and look it over. A man has been found dead in one of the cold storage rooms."

"Found dead!"

"Dead and frozen stiff! How he came to be locked in the room is a mystery. As I

get it from Raymond, the general manager there, the circumstances are extraordinary. It is a case of accident—or something worse!"

"Are you still in communication with Raymond?"

"Yes."

"Tell him I will hurry right down there."

"Go ahead, then, and report to me later. Drop the Mekleburg matter, if this proves to be more important."

"I will," Keene called over his shoulder, as he hastened from the office and through the corridor out into Pemberton Square.

It was a walk of ten minutes, only, from there to the great cold-storage building owned and operated by the Atlas company; and the general manager, who had been in

communication with the chief of the Boston inspectors, met Sheridan Keene at the office door.

"Detective Keene?" he said, inquiringly.

"Yes," bowed the latter. "You are Mr. Raymond, I take it?"

"The same, sir. Come in."

"I understand you have had an accident here; a fatality," said Keene, as he followed the manager into the large square office on the ground floor.

Mr. Raymond led Detective Keene to his private office before responding. He was a portly man of about fifty years, with a pleasing face, grave just at that time, and expressive dark eyes. Combined with sterling integrity and superior business qualifications, he possessed, also, those genial social characteristics which made him one of the most popular men on the street.

Indeed, there had been a fatality; for, in one of the rooms above, in which the temperature was perennially at least thirty degrees below zero, lay the stiff, frozen body of a man, walled up, as it were, within this icy tomb.

What visions could be conjured up if it were true that the man had been imprisoned in that fateful room, alive! With what frantic efforts must he have tried to break down that thick door that was holding him a prisoner; and, finally, when hope at last forsook him, how hopelessly must he have sunk down to that cold sleep, which was slowly congealing his very blood.

The Atlas company's cold-storage building is a structure of six stories, and is as curious a building as one is often privileged to enter. Looking at the lofty brick walls, which are almost void of windows, one ignorant of the purpose for which it had been constructed would wonder for what it was used, and what curious equipment might be found within.

The building occupies nearly half a block, with four massive walls of stone and brick. On the street floor in front are the office, a shipper's room, and an entrance to one of the side elevators.

In the middle of the building is the main elevator well, which contains two large square elevators for the carrying of merchandise to the floors above.

Occupying nearly the entire surface of the floors above, are the large rooms in which perishable merchandise is placed for cold storage. Most of these rooms are entirely without windows, which would be to a disadvantage in that the rooms must be constantly kept at a very low temperature. They are lighted by electricity, and the only features that relieve their bare, uninviting interiors are the rows of iron pipes overhead, the conduits of the vast quantities of ammonia by the evaporation of which is produced the low temperature desired.

These rooms are accessible from adjoining long corridors, which entirely surround and also adjoin the elevator wells. These also are lighted by electricity. One's first impression when walking through them is not agreeable. They are frequently deserted for long intervals, the character of the business requiring comparatively few employees, the most of whom have no duty taking them either to the store-rooms or corridors. For hours at a time, both are frequently deserted. The building is vast; the walls massive; the doors are thick and heavy. One's impression is that of some gloomy castle, or vast prison; the corridors of which are dungeons, and the great store-rooms icy cells. One instinctively thinks that he can lose nothing by keeping out of such a place.

It was the very place and surroundings, however, for such a mystery as had been discovered on that December morning, and which now was confronting the general man-

ager of the Atlas Cold Storage Company, and Sheridan Keene, the detective.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECRET OF THE COLD STORAGE.

Mr. Raymond turned to Sheridan Keene and replied to his last remark:

"Fatality is the better word, Detective Keene," he said, gravely. "We are sure there has been a fatality. I wish we were equally sure that it was the result of an accident."

"You imply that you fear something more serious," said Keene, looking him in the eye.

"I can only say this," replied Mr. Raymond. "I cannot understand how such an accident could possibly have occurred."

Keene instinctively felt that the Mekleburg matter was to be dropped.

"Let me know some of the circumstances, Mr. Raymond, if you please," he said, gravely. "When was the fatality discovered?"

"About half an hour ago."

"By whom?"

"By Mr. Weaver, one of our employees, whose duty is chiefly that of keeping each of the several store-rooms at a uniform temperature. This necessitates a visit to each of the rooms every hour or two, where he consults a thermometer hung just inside the door. If any change of temperature is required, he effects it by varying the supply of ammonia through the pipes by means of valve-wheels, which also are near the corridor door."

"What was Mr. Weaver's discovery, please?" inquired Keene, courteously, bringing the gentleman more to the point.

"Weaver came on duty at eight o'clock, and, as usual, began his round of the rooms. On opening the door of the room in which fish is stored, and which is on the upper floor, he discovered the dead body of a man,

who was about here on business yesterday afternoon, and who visited that room in company with one of my clerks, Mr. Burton."

"Where is the body now, Mr. Raymond?"

"It has not been moved, sir. When Weaver hastened down to me and reported his discovery, I at once telephoned to Chief Watts, and he advised me not to disturb the body before an investigation had been made. The door of the fish-room already had been closed, and I immediately stationed two of my men outside, to prevent any person from entering. Things in the room are precisely as Weaver found them. Shall we go up there?"

"Are you quite positive that the man is dead, Mr. Raymond?"

"Oh, indeed, yes!" was the exclamation. "Good heavens! he presumably has been locked in that room since yesterday afternoon, and its uniform temperature is nearly thirty degrees below zero, and sixty below freezing. It is necessary to keep that room the coldest of any in the building. I doubt if the man could have lived an hour in there."

"Then, as nothing can be done for the man," said Keene, gravely; "I will ask you one or two questions before we visit the scene."

"Certainly, certainly," bowed Mr. Raymond. "Take a chair. Pardon my not having invited you to do so before. I am so exercised by this tragedy that I can scarce contain myself. I will, if able, answer any questions you may ask."

"To begin with, then," said Keene, taking a seat only on the arm of the chair; "is the identity of the dead man known to you?"

"Oh yes. The man is Captain Peleg Cavendish."

"A seafaring man?"

"A fisherman. He was owner and captain of a small fishing schooner, named *Mollie*. He spent most of his time afloat, run-

ning into port every few days to market his fish. He had quite a good head for business, however; and frequently, when the market was glutted and prices low, he has stored his fish with us until the trade conditions enabled him to realize a profit. It was in this way that we became acquainted with him."

"How old a man?"

"I should say about sixty."

"A man of means?"

"Moderate only, I imagine."

"Married."

"He was a widower, and has one daughter, a girl of nineteen."

"What sort of a man was Captain Cavendish, as you have observed him?"

"As rough and disagreeable an old curmudgeon as one often meets," said Raymond, with a dismal smile. "He was invariably coarse and grouty, always finding fault about something, either suspecting his fish were short, or growling over delays in receipt or delivery; and, in fact, was as unpleasant in all ways as if the very elements of sea and storms had imbued him with their own violent qualities."

"An outspoken man, then?"

"I should say so! One of the open-your-door-or-I'll-kick-it-off-its-hinges style of men, and as boisterous as a summer sou'easter. That was Captain Peleg Cavendish, sir; and I've not overdrawn the picture, I assure you."

"How long have you known him?"

"We have stored fish for him off and on for two or three years."

"Has he fish in store here now?"

"Yes, a ton or more."

"Did the business upon which he called here yesterday relate to them?"

"Yes."

"At what time was he here?"

"Between four and five o'clock," replied

Mr. Raymond. "Ordinarily I have made it a point to handle Captain Cavendish personally, as I could do so to better advantage than any of my subordinates. As it happened, I was away yesterday afternoon, and the duty fell upon one of my chief assistants, Mr. Burton."

"Is Burton here this morning?"

"He was about here a few minutes ago. I will call him if you wish."

"Not at present," replied Keene, with a shake of his head. "Tell me, instead, what Burton says of the affair?"

"He reports that Cavendish called to look over the fish he has in storage, some of which he thought of removing this morning. Accordingly Burton went with him to the store-room, where some of the fish belonging to Cavendish had been transferred from the bin in which they originally had been tossed, and placed on the opposite side of the room. This had been done in order to make room for those of another customer, and to prevent confusion."

"I understand," Keene gravely nodded.

"On observing the change, Cavendish immediately cut loose like a tornado, and swore that his fish had been bruised and injured in the handling. As Burton is a mettlesome young man, and not afraid to say his soul is his own, quite a serious clash was the result, and for half an hour or more a stormy altercation ensued, both in the fish-room and in the adjoining corridor."

"Did the men come to blows?"

"Oh, no!" and Raymond shook his head. "But words are sometimes worse than blows, Detective Keene, as you are well aware. Another unfortunate feature of the affair lies in the fact that Cavendish and Burton have been at cross-grain for some little time."

"About what?"

"It seems that Cavendish has a very pretty daughter, for whom Burton has a pro-

nounced liking, and to whom he has persisted in paying attention when Cavendish was away fishing. The old man has opposed this, with characteristic severity and bluster, and as a result he and Burton were at loggerheads. This matter also came up in the dissension of yesterday afternoon, and I guess that some pretty rough language passed between the two. Burton now states that he finally left Cavendish in the corridor, and returned to the office. He says he don't know where Cavendish went, but that he took it for granted that he departed, either by the stairs or elevator, and went about his business. The next we knew of Cavendish he was found as stated, dead as a doornail, and frozen as stiff as one of his own fish. That is the whole story, Detective Keene, as far as I am able to disclose it."

"How old a man is Burton?" demanded Sheridan Keene, now absolutely certain that the Mekleburg matter must be dropped."

"Burton is about thirty."

"How long has he been in your employ?"

"About six years."

"What can you say about him?"

"Only words of emphatic commendation," replied Raymond, with genuine fervor. "He is a splendid type of young American manhood, as square as a brick, as firm as a rock, and one of the most popular men in my employ. I know of no man, now that Cavendish is toes-up, who would say one word against Frank Burton."

"That is all at present," said Keene, gravely. "I now will go up to the fish-room."

"Come this way, and I will go with you."

"Indicate Burton to me as we pass out of the office, if he is there," said Keene, softly, as Raymond opened the door of his private office.

But Frank Burton was not in the main office.

CHAPTER III.

THE FROZEN CLEW.

Detective Keene followed Raymond through the office, and thence to an interior corridor leading to the main elevators. These were noticeably large, being intended for merchandise only. The shaft in which they operated was fully twenty feet square, and was lighted by a large window in the roof. As they ascended, Keene observed that the corridor doors opened to the shaft from all four sides.

"The store-rooms occupy most of the building, I take it?" he observed, inquiringly.

"Yes, about all of these upper floors," explained Mr. Raymond. "We store fruit, vegetables and dairy products on the second and third. The rooms on the fourth contain poultry and dressed meats. Just at present there is only one room in use on the fifth floor, that in which fish are stored. Here we are."

He drew the check line, while speaking, and opened the door giving egress to the adjoining corridor. The latter was about six feet wide, with only the bare wooden walls on either side. An incandescent light at intervals threw a yellow glow over the place, and rather accentuated its depressing aspect of solidity.

At a door some twenty feet from the elevator, four men were standing in subdued, yet earnest conversation. Keene, however, as he left the elevator, caught the words which fell in louder tones from one of the four.

"I think we should go in there," he was saying, as if in argument against opposition to so doing. "There's a bare possibility that old Cavendish may still be alive. D—— it, Weaver ——"

"Here is Mr. Raymond, now!" exclaimed Weaver, interrupting the other. "I've obeyed his orders only, and if you wish to go in so

badly, Mr. Wagner, you now can get his permission."

"Oh, I'm not over anxious!" Wagner quickly retorted. "Only I feared the man might not be dead."

"There is no doubt about the death of Cavendish, Mr. Wagner," said Raymond, as he and Keene approached the group. "I have examined the remains."

Sheridan Keene merely glanced at the several men. Two of them were stout Irishmen, evidently workers about the place. Weaver was a young man of twenty-two, with a frank, youthful face. The last, and the one whose words Keene had noticed, was a short, heavy man, in the blouse and overalls of an engineer. He appeared to be about forty, and by his florid face and reddish hair, was a man of German extraction, as his name also indicated. His countenance was not prepossessing, and his pale blue eyes had an inquisitive light, which augmented this disagreeable impression.

"I didn't know you'd seen him, Mr. Raymond," he hurriedly explained, evidently having observed the curt tone of the latter. "I had no other reason for wishing to enter the store-room."

"Nobody says you had."

Yet, when Weaver threw the bar-lock of the door, and swung open the heavy wooden portal, Wagner pressed forward to enter with the others.

Then Sheridan Keene took a hand.

Thrusting the man rudely aside, he said, sharply:

"You stay where you are, my man, and all the rest of you, except Mr. Raymond! When your services are required in here, I will tell you. Who are these two workmen, Mr. Raymond?"

"They are men who work at loading and unloading the elevators, sir," replied Raymond, quite startled by the detective's commanding tone.

"Send them about their business, please. I don't want them here. Is this the Mr. Weaver who discovered the body?"

"Yes, sir."

"And who is this man?"

"My assistant engineer, Mr. Wagner. He by chance overheard part of the altercation yesterday afternoon."

"Request him and Mr. Weaver to remain here in the corridor, then," said Keene, firmly. "Send one of the others for the district medical examiner, so that the body may be legally removed as soon as I am through here. Here is his address."

"I will have it taken down to the office, and a message sent by telephone."

"Very well, sir. Now, Mr. Weaver, kindly open that door again. I think I first will look into this room alone."

A slight frown had risen to the face of Raymond, even, and a scowl of open resentment furrowed Wagner's low brow; but Sheridan Keene, who rarely assumed any attitude without a well-defined object, seemed to have no eyes for any of this. Stepping by Weaver, he quickly entered the store-room and signed for the young man to close the door.

"If I close it entirely, sir, the lights will go out and you will be left in darkness," Weaver hurriedly explained, in low tones.

"Does the closing of this door switch off the lights in the room?"

"Yes, sir, all of them; but I can close it all but a few inches."

"Do so, then."

Since arriving there, even, Sheridan Keene had found good reason for wishing to preclude any observation of his immediate movements by those in the corridor. He glanced back after entering, and was satisfied that he could not be seen.

The room in which he stood was about fifty feet deep, and rather more than half

as wide. Where they were not obstructed by the great bins of loose fish, which were frozen stiff and hard as stone, the dull walls looked cold and bare. The door by which he had entered was a foot thick. The odor of fish was strong in the dry air, and the place was relieved of its general repulsiveness by only one feature.

This feature was overhead, and had been added by nature, not by man. It was an adornment surpassing in brilliancy and beauty the most vivid production of stage-craft. Round the ammonia pipes which ran the length of the room, and a little below the ceiling, was congealed to the thickness of several inches, every free atom of moisture in the air of this great chamber. The pipes themselves were entirely hidden in the dazzling white crystal of snow and ice, which gleamed and glistened like millions of diamonds in the glow of the incandescent lights.

Keene instantly felt the penetrating chill of the room, and quickly buttoned his coat. It was a more treacherous cold than that of the bitterest winter day; it was that dry, intense cold which freezes one before one knows it. The detective glanced at a thermometer hung on the wall near the door; it registered thirty degrees below zero.

"Goodness!" muttered Keene, quickly. "This is a place to get out of in a hurry."

He at once began his investigation, and turned first to a figure lying on the floor a few yards from the door. It was the dead body of Captain Peleg Cavendish, of the fishing schooner *Mollie*. He was lying flat on his back, with arms extended and face upturned; a robust, corpulent figure, with full round facial features, now white and cold in death. The body was clad in a fisherman's garb, as if Captain Cavendish had just come up from his craft. A tarpaulin hat had fallen from his head. His capacious dogskin jacket was entirely unbuttoned, and a thick woolen shirt, in which he was clad, was open

at the throat, disclosing his hairy neck almost as low as his broad chest. His feet and legs were incased in long rubber boots, reaching nearly to his hips; and altogether he presented very much the type of man described by Mr. Raymond, a man of irascible temperament and plethoric constitution.

To the eyes of an ordinary observer, these would have been very natural conditions in which to have found this man; viewed by the eyes of Sheridan Keene, they gave rise to a series of most astute and startling deductions.

"There is something very extraordinary in this affair," he involuntarily muttered, perplexed for the moment. "I don't quite understand why—aha! what is this?"

His searching gaze, which had been directed at several small wooden cases near by, and at three or four frozen fish which were lying near the wall a few yards beyond the door, now fell upon a tiny object the glisten of which caught his eye. He quickly stepped across the body of Cavendish, and picked up the object from the floor close against the wall.

It proved to be a round glass vial, about the size of a man's little finger. Pasted around it was a narrow label, on which was written a date and the number of a prescription. The diminutive size of the bottle, however, had necessitated clipping the label, and the name of the druggist by whom the prescription had been filled had been cut off, either by the druggist himself, or had subsequently been scraped off by the purchaser. Evidently it was a vial of medicine, a dark liquid that then was frozen solid, and which in congealing had forced the cork from the bottle and cracked the glass.

Keene found the cork near by and replaced it, then glanced at the date on the label. It was that of the previous day, on which evidently the medicine had been purchased.

"A frozen clew!" dryly exclaimed Keene, under his breath. "Though it thaws, I still shall have the prescription."

He wrapped the vial in the folds of his handkerchief, to insure the absorption of the liquid should it leak from the bottle, and placed it in his coat pocket. Then he again stepped over the body, and called sharply:

"Open that door, please, Mr. Weaver! You now may come in here, gentlemen."

The door was immediately opened and Mr. Raymond entered, followed not only by Weaver and the engineer, but also by several other employees who, meantime, had gathered outside.

Sheridan Keene immediately assumed that artful air of indifferent interest with which he frequently blinded persons with whom he was in contact at such a time, and observed, with courteous gravity:

"I always like to look over evidence alone, in a case of this kind, Mr. Raymond, when it comes right. I don't find anything of special significance, however. Please do not approach the body, gentlemen. It must not be disturbed until viewed by the medical examiner. I would like to make a few inquiries while here, if you please."

"Stand where you are, boys," added Raymond, quickly. "Ask any questions you wish, Detective Keene."

The several men halted near the door. The eyes of all were turned curiously upon the detective, with whose name and reputation for cleverness all were familiar, yet few of whom had hitherto seen him personally.

Keene immediately turned to Weaver, and said:

"You are the young man who discovered this fatality, I am told. Were you alone at the time?"

"Yes, sir, I was," Weaver quickly replied, stepping out from the group.

"Now answer my questions concisely,

please, for we don't wish to remain in this cold room longer than necessary. At what time did you go on duty this morning?"

"At eight o'clock, sir."

"And at what time did you discover the body?"

"About half-past eight."

"Did you enter the room upon making the discovery?"

"I already was in the room, sir. I had come here to see if the temperature was sufficiently low."

"What did you do when you saw the body of Captain Cavendish lying there?"

"I hurried away to tell Mr. Raymond, sir."

"Did you make any examination of the body?"

"No, sir; I did not. I saw at a glance that the man was dead, and I immediately hastened down to the office and told Mr. Raymond."

"Do I understand, Mr. Raymond, that this room is visited each hour or two during both day and night?"

"Yes, Detective Keene," bowed the manager. "Our employees whose duty is that of regulating the temperature of these rooms work eight consecutive hours. They then are relieved by another."

"Who was on duty before you, Mr. Weaver?" demanded Keene, again reverting to the latter.

"A man named Jones, sir. He came on duty at twelve o'clock last night, and worked until eight o'clock this morning."

"And who before him?"

"A man named Morton, sir, who worked from four yesterday afternoon until midnight."

"Can you offer any explanation, Mr. Weaver, of the fact that neither of those men discovered the body of Captain Cavendish, which is believed to have been here since yesterday?"

"Very easily, sir," Weaver quickly explained. "Probably neither of them entered the room. It's not necessary to enter, sir, in order to consult the thermometer, which you see hangs close to the door. Lying where it does, sir, the body is obscured by the door, unless the person who opens it steps well into the room. Ordinarily we merely step over the threshold to glance at the thermometer, and if the temperature is right we immediately withdraw and close the door. That is probably what Jones and Morton both did."

"What led you to enter the room this morning?"

"The temperature had risen a few degrees, sir, and I stepped in to regulate the supply of ammonia. When I had done so, I noticed on the floor a fish which should have been in one of the bins. In going to place it where it belonged, I walked beyond the open door, which still hid the body from observation; and then I discovered that Cavendish was lying there."

"I see," nodded Keene. Then, in all probability, Jones and Morton found no occasion to enter the room. Is that your idea?"

"Precisely, sir. It was more by chance than otherwise that I made the discovery."

"After you made it, did any person enter the room?"

"Only Mr. Raymond, sir. We came right up from the office, and Mr. Raymond looked at the body. Then he stationed me outside to prevent any one from entering, and went down to telephone to the police."

"Did you remain at the door from that time until I arrived here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did any person enter the room?"

"No, sir."

"What did you do here when you came up from the office, Mr. Raymond?"

"I simply glanced at the body, Detective Keene," replied the manager, wondering what these precise inquiries might imply. "I at

once saw that Cavendish was dead, and I immediately hastened to take the action necessary in such a peculiar case."

"Did you touch the body?"

"Indeed, no!" Raymond exclaimed, with a shudder, either from cold or a feeling of repulsion.

"How long did you remain in the room?"

"Less than a minute, sir, at the most."

"Thank you," nodded Keene. "You said, Mr. Weaver, that you do not usually see these frozen fish lying about the floor. There are two or three over there near the wall. Do you know if they were there yesterday?"

"I cannot say definitely, sir; but I don't think that they were."

"Can you in any way account for their being there?"

"I don't think I can, sir," and Mr. Weaver smiled doubtfully and shook his head.

"Oh, ho, Weaver! you're a blockhead!" sounded a voice from amid the group of interested men. "A boy of ten ought to be able to answer that question! It's as plain as the nose on an elephant's face why the fish are there!"

CHAPTER IV.

MR. WAGNER'S STARTLING TESTIMONY.

The startling interruption was imbued with a caustic mingling of sarcasm and contempt, and had issued in resonant chest tones from the lips of the beetle-browed engineer of the Atlas Cold Storage, the man named John Wagner. He thrust himself forward while speaking, and with an inviting stare that bordered close upon insolence, he surveyed the calm face of the detective, as much as if he challenged being asked the same question.

A curious light momentarily showed in the depths of Keene's grave eyes; but he responded with careless deliberation, and a faint smile playing around his clean-cut lips:

"An elephant's nose, as you term it, is quite

a distinctive feature of the animal's face. What do you say, Mr. Wagner, in explanation of the fact that the frozen fish lie yonder, rather than in the bin where they belong?"

"What do I say?" cried Mr. Wagner, wisely wagging his red head and starting out from the group of men. "What would any man say who stopped to think a bit? What would you do, or any man do, if he found himself shut in here with the lights out, and death from freezing staring him in the face?"

"I presume that he would try to get out," said Keene, dryly.

"Sure he'd try to get out!" exclaimed Wagner, with extraordinary interest and energy. "He'd have bats in his belfry if he didn't! Ay, ay, sir! he'd try to get out. And old Cavendish, sir, wasn't the kind o' man to lay down and give up the ghost without a scrap to prevent it—any o' these men'll tell you that, Mr. Detective! No, no, sir! Cavendish was a sandy old devil, from his toes up. I've seen enough o' him to know that."

"But what about the fish?" innocently questioned Keene, who was giving this fellow all the line he wanted.

"What about the fish?" echoed Wagner, with derisive emphasis. "D'ye think, man, he went and tapped on the door with his knuckles, the like o' that? Thundering guns! he'd not ha' been heard by a man outside with his ear to the wall. These walls are as thick as the door, man. No, no, sir! Old Cavendish just felt about here in the dark till he laid hold o' two or three o' these fish—stiff and hard as chunks o' wood, they are! And with these he banged on the wall, sir; and there they now lie where Cavendish dropped 'em just before he was overcome by the cold."

"By Jove, Mr. Wagner, I believe that theory is pretty nearly correct!" cried Keene, with a quick display of much appreciation and interest. "It's a hundred to one it is."

"It appears very reasonable," put in Mr. Raymond.

"And if you look on the wall where he beat against it," triumphantly added Wagner, "you'd ought to find signs of it, marks o' the blows, or some scales from the fish. This is only a theory, mind you, and they mayn't be there; but it——"

"They are here!" cried Keene, interrupting him with an unusual display of exultant approval. "Wagner, you'd ought to be on the force! Here are plain indications of heavy blows, and here is one of the fish with his head half gone. Good heavens! this man's experience must have been something awful. Knowing that help was so near, and yet unable to make himself heard! Would the sound of this blow reach the corridor, Mr. Wagner?"

As he spoke, Keene took up one of the frozen fish, a bluefish of six or eight pounds, and with it dealt the wall a forcible blow. There was no resonance in the sound that followed the stroke, however. It was like striking a wall of stone with a stick of wood. Even sound itself seemed bereft of its normal qualities by the awful cold of the room.

"Ay, sir, that sound would ha' been heard in the corridor; but only faintly, sir," declared Wagner, striding forward to stand by the detective's side. "Besides, sir, in the case o' Cavendish, the corridor most likely was vacant. A man would have had to be quite near to have heard that sound outside."

"That seems quite probable," admitted Keene.

"Besides, sir, this room is in total darkness after the door is closed. Old Cavendish couldn't ha' seen his own nose, say nothing o' seeing to bang and beat this wall, even if 'twould ha' done him any good. But his was the hand that brought these fish here, I'll lay long odds on that."

"I am quite convinced that you are right," replied Sheridan Keene, with a nod of approval. "This door cannot be opened from within, can it?"

"No, sir; not when it's fastened outside. It opens in, you see, and locks only with an outside bar, which closes it very snug to the casing. A man might stand here and yell his lungs out, and he'd not be heard by a man in the corridor, unless he knew the other to be here, and so should listen."

"It was a terrible situation for the old seaman," observed Keene, with a sad shake of his head. "If he was locked in here through carelessness, there is a case of criminal negligence against the person guilty of it. If it was done with malice aforethought—"

"The last is more like it, sir; a d— sight more like it!" Wagner quickly interrupted, with lowered voice. "If you had heard what I heard about here yesterday afternoon, you'd be o' my thinking, sir, I'll wager!"

Sheridan Keene did not quite fancy the manner with which this was said, nor the lowered voice and the gleam of Wagner's small eyes; but the significance of it all, in a case of such serious importance, was not wisely to be ignored.

"Then you overheard the altercation between Cavendish and Mr. Burton, did you?" he demanded, with a display of eagerness to which Wagner was by no means blind.

"Aye, sir, I did," declared the latter, hitching his overalls higher on his hips. "Leastwise, sir, I heard parts of it."

"Where were you at the time?"

"I was busy doing a job on the elevator drum, sir, out yonder."

"At the top of the elevator well?"

"That's just where."

"Could you hear them from up there?"

"At times I could," replied Wagner, with an emphatic nod. "Old Cavendish had a voice like a fog-horn, sir, which he wa'nt slow to use; and Burton's no slouch in a word fight. It grew so hot before they were done, sir, that I came down from the job I was doing, and thought I'd take a hand to part 'em."

"Did you do so?"

"As a matter o' fact, sir, I didn't. I rather made up my mind I'd better keep out o' the mess. But I stood a while in the corridor, and 'twas then I heard some o' what was said."

"Where were the two men at that time, Mr. Wagner?" demanded Keene.

Though his searching gaze rarely left the lowering face of the man with whom he was talking, his questions were asked with affected indifference only, yet with a rapidity which allowed of no interference on the part of Mr. Raymond, or the group of grave-visaged men standing a few yards away.

It was a curious scene, that of that fateful December morning—the strange environment, the motionless figure lying there, pale in death, the group of men shivering with the cold indoors, the erect figure and gravely-earnest face of the young detective, with his collar turned up about his neck and his hands thrust deep in his overcoat pockets, while he confronted with steadfast gaze the round-shouldered, repellent fellow who appeared to know more than any other of the dissension which evidently had led to the direful tragedy. It was a scene long remembered by those who observed it.

"They were here in the room, sir," replied Wagner, ready enough to impart all he knew.

"Could you see them from the corridor?"

"Not when I first came down from my job, sir." •

"Did you see them at all, Mr. Wagner?"

"Ay, sir, I did! The door yonder was partly open, and I came near enough to look in between it and the casing—right there between the hinges!"

"Where were the two men standing at that time?"

"Burton stood here, sir, nearly where I am."

"Did you see Cavendish, also?"

"Ay, sir, I did!"

Keene carelessly reached out his hand and laid it on the speaker's shoulder.

"Show me, Mr. Wagner," he said, with augmented earnestness, "precisely where Captain Cavendish was standing when you last saw him!"

Wagner involuntarily shrank a little from the unexpected touch of the detective, and a resentful gleam flashed quickly from his eyes; yet he instantly replied, shaking off Keene's hand from his shoulder:

"He stood right here, sir! He stood so! I saw his face, and 'twas red as a lobster, for all the cold. I never saw a man look angrier in all my life, sir. 'Twas the sight of his ugly face that led me to slip away and return to my job. I thought I'd best not shove an oar into troubled waters, since Burton was big enough and strong enough to look after himself."

"Was Burton also angry, Mr. Wagner?" demanded Keene, checking with a gesture an interruption from Raymond, who did not at all fancy the loquacity of his assistant engineer. "Give me the whole story, Mr. Wagner. It will have to be told here or elsewhere, so out with it. Did Burton appear to be angry?"

"Not in the beginning, sir," replied Wagner, who had caught a glance from his employer.

"Tell me the whole truth, sir!" cried Keene, sternly. "How do you know that he was not angry in the beginning?"

"Because I heard him trying to pacify Cavendish," was the quick reply. "The old man was mad because his fish had been moved, and Burton was trying to square it. That's how the trouble began, sir."

"Well, how did it end, so far as you know? At what stage did you come down from the job on which you were engaged?"

"'Twas after five when I came down, sir,

I'd say," cried Wagner, irritated by Keene's forcible manner. "I know that, sir, because I found it too dark to work when I returned. One word had led to another between the two men, and when I saw 'em they were hard at it, hammer and tongs, about Mollie Cavendish, the seaman's yaller-headed daughter."

"One moment, Mr. Raymond!" Keene sternly cried, again preventing an interruption. "Please do not interrupt him, sir." Keene's manner was exciting Wagner, as he intended it should. "Go on, Mr. Wagner," Keene said, turning toward him again. "What was the nature of the dispute between the two men, and how did the girl figure in it?"

"The girl is the seaman's only daughter," cried Wagner, with a malicious fire now glowing in his eyes. "The old man claimed, and I guess he's more'n half right, that Burton has been a bit too friendly with the girl. She's a rattle-brained whisp of a thing, with more beauty than character, and it's odds that Burton——"

But he got no further. His words had reached the ears of one of several men who were then approaching through the corridor, a man who started forward as if suddenly lashed with a whip. He came over the threshold and into the store-room without an atom of color left in his face, and his every feature convulsed with swelling fury.

With a single sweep of his arm he cleared his way at the door, and with a bound had seized Wagner by the throat, catching up the latter's words with a passion close upon madness.

"What odds about Burton? It's odds that Burton will cut your lying tongue from your head, John Wagner! Say what you like of me, you cursed reviler! but decry again the girl whose father lies dead there, and I'll not leave a whole bone in your miscreant's skin! Let go of me, stranger, or I'll do you harm! I'll not——"

Sheridan Keene had seized him from behind, and with strength superior to that of both combined, he broke the hold which Burton had upon Wagner's throat, and fairly hurled the impassioned man into the very arms of the startled observers, whom amazement and consternation had till then held spellbound.

"Secure him, gentlemen!" he quickly cried. "This is no scene to be enacted in the presence of the dead!"

Yet even with the words, the detective himself seized Wagner in his arms, crushing him bodily against the wall, and bending to whisper forcibly in his ear:

"Hold your peace, you fool! If you know aught of this man, tell me alone—and I will run him down!"

For an instant the eyes of the two men met, and those of Wagner changed like a flash, and the light of fear that was in them became the light of evil satisfaction.

"Let go!" he muttered, hoarsely, panting for breath. "I'll do what you say!"

Sheridan Keene instantly released him, and swung round to the men who now held Burton by the arms.

CHAPTER V.

FRANK BURTON DECLARES HIMSELF.

The assault upon John Wagner had begun and ended in less than a minute, yet it had been as violent and vengeful as brief. The assailant, whom Sheridan Keene now beheld to better advantage, and whose anger yielded somewhat to the influence of his friends, was a man of about thirty years, with an attractive face and figure of an athlete.

His face was then very pale, though his eyes still glowed angrily; while his clenched hands and the nervous twitching of the lips beneath his dark mustache indicated that only by an effort could he yet contain himself.

"Who is this man, Mr. Raymond?" Keene

quickly demanded, in authoritative tones, as he strode nearer. "Is this the Mr. Burton of whom we were speaking?"

Raymond merely nodded an affirmative; but Burton instantly cried, in a tone of resentment and defiance which he made no effort to conceal:

"What is it to you, whether or not I'm Mr. Burton? Who are you, that you should know?"

"I am Detective Keene, of the Boston inspectors."

Burton's manner instantly underwent a change. He started slightly, cast a quick glance at the face of Cavendish, and impulsively cried:

"In that case, Detective Keene, you have a right to ask. I beg your pardon!"

"Quite willingly granted," replied the detective, still with some curtness. "You, Mr. Burton, are the last person as yet known to have seen Captain Cavendish alive; and it is only fair you should know that what you now say possibly may be used against you."

Burton threw back his head with a scornful frown, and answered shortly:

"Thanks for the caution! Fear never yet has bridled my tongue, however, and it's least liable to do so in this case. It is long odds, sir, that I am not the last to have seen Captain Cavendish alive, whatever you or any other man may think about it."

"Do you know of any person who saw him alive later than yourself?"

"I do not. I know only that I left him alive."

"At what time, Mr. Burton?"

"A little after five o'clock yesterday afternoon."

"Where did you leave him, sir?"

"In the corridor, just outside that door."

"Did you have an altercation here with Captain Cavendish yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"Do you care to state the occasion of it?"

"Why no, indeed? It related to the fish which he had in store here, and which——"

"One moment, please," interposed Keene, raising his hand to stay him. "Were these several fish lying here upon the floor at that time?"

"They were not, sir."

"Do you know how they came there?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"Did you, Mr. Burton, leave Captain Cavendish in this room, or did he go with you to the corridor?"

"He went with me, sir, about quarter-past five."

"Clear the way here!" Keene now cried, striding toward the open door. "Mr. Raymond, won't you send down for the street patrolman at once. I want these people dispersed. Fall back, gentlemen! Back as far as the elevators, and don't obstruct these passageways. Close that door, again, Mr. Weaver, and keep it closed till the medical examiner arrives."

During the brief time required for the foregoing incidents in the store-room, the gathering in the corridor had been greatly augmented, and only after some delay could Sheridan Keene force back the numbers eager to get a glimpse of the dead man. He cleared a space in the corridor, however, where the air was much warmer, and to which Mr. Raymond and the others had quickly followed him, glad enough to leave the icy temperature of the store-room.

John Wagner now drew back among the crowd, from which he stood grimly surveying the proceedings; but, with a gesture, Sheridan Keene prevented Burton from departing, even if he had been so inclined.

"Now about your altercation with Captain Cavendish," said the detective, the moment he saw that Weaver had complied with his commands. "What was the occasion for that?"

"Cavendish found fault because his fish had been removed, and I resented his abusive language," Burton immediately replied, in forceful tones, and again frowning darkly when he found himself the very center of general observation, if not, indeed, of suspicion also.

"Was that all?" demanded Keene, sharply.

"No, not all," retorted Burton, quickly. "That led up to another difference which has existed between Cavendish and myself, growing out of the fact that I am a friend of his daughter, Mary Cavendish, who is precisely an opposite type of girl from what that scurrilous blackguard yonder has implied. I am not done with you, Wagner, for that insult, and I'll yet thrash you within an inch of your life!" he broke off to add, violently shaking his fist at the engineer. "You're a cursed liar, you know, and I'll cram your words down your own throat before I sleep, if I'm not run in for——"

"Peace, Frank!" interposed Raymond, who had constantly kept his hand through the younger man's arm, as if he knew his excitable temperament and feared to what it might lead. "That kind of talk will do you no good, and may do much harm. Have no more of it!"

"You're no doubt right, Mr. Raymond; but I am not a man calmly to hear a virtuous girl defamed by a lying whelp like that one yonder," Burton answered, less violently.

Then his frowning dark eyes reverted again to the detective's, and he added roundly:

"Now what will you have, Detective Keene? I'll try to give you alone my attention; and let me add, sir, I am ready to answer any question you may ask, so be it I am able."

"I wish only to learn the facts in this case," curtly answered Keene, who, for reasons of his own, had suffered Burton to freely use

his tongue. "How long were you in dispute with Captain Cavendish?"

"May be a half hour, sir."

"Did you come to blows?"

"No, sir."

"Did most of the dissension occur in the store-room?"

"Nearly all of it, Detective Keene. I had very few words with Captain Cavendish after we came into the corridor."

"Were you both angry when you left the store-room?"

"Very angry, sir," admitted Burton. "Captain Cavendish was unusually excited, sir, and as he had a wicked tongue, which in most men I'd have answered with a blow, I decided, for the sake of another—oh, I don't mind telling you whom, sir! It was for the sake of his daughter! I decided I'd end the squabble by getting out of it. And I don't mind admitting that I wound up my part of it by telling Captain Cavendish to go straight to blazes; and I turned with that and hurried down-stairs, without waiting to see whether he went or not. I hope heartily he did not, sir, though God knows it looks enough like it now. And that's all I know, Detective Keene, concerning the death of Captain Cavendish."

Sheridan Keene paid no attention to the murmurs of approval which quickly echoed Burton's words, and which had, despite occasional license, the ring of true and fearless manhood. He at once asked, with sustained austerity:

"Where did you leave Cavendish, Mr. Burton?"

"Right here in this corridor, sir, close by the store-room door."

"Did you observe which way he went?"

"I did not see him from the moment I turned away, sir. I hurried down to the office, and remained there until after six o'clock."

"What did you infer about it?"

"I inferred nothing. I did not care where Cavendish went."

"Did you go down by the elevator?"

"No, sir; I took the stairs."

"Did you meet anybody on your way down?"

"No, sir."

"Did you while in the store-room, or in this corridor, see any person excepting Captain Cavendish?"

"Not a soul, sir! But I have since heard that yonder abortive——"

"Never mind what you have heard," Keene instantly interposed. "I wish to ascertain only what you absolutely know. Have you been attending to your usual duties this morning, Mr. Burton?"

"No, I have not."

"Were you about the building when I arrived here, say, half an hour ago?"

"No, sir, I was not."

"Do you object to stating where you were?"

"No, sir, I do not; so be it you care to know," cried Burton, flinging up his head with a sort of scornful indifference. "I had just heard of the death of Captain Cavendish, and my first thought, and my greatest solicitude turned toward the motherless girl he leaves. I went to break the sad news to Mary Cavendish, sir, that it should be done more gently than others might do it; and I returned only in time to hear yonder cur speak ill of her whom I had left heartbroken and in tears. Don't blame me, sir, that I was cut deep by his lying words. You'd not blame me, had I sent him after Cavendish, even, did you know the innocence of the girl as I know it! Now, what more, sir? I've told you all I can, though you were to question me till doomsday."

"Where does Miss Cavendish live, Mr. Burton?" asked Keene, without heeding the young man's display of tender feeling.

"She boards at the North Hotel, sir, on Atlantic avenue."

"Isn't that chiefly a seaman's lodging-house?"

"Yes, sir; and where her father lived when ashore."

"And where is your home, Mr. Burton?"

"I recently have taken a room in the same house," said Burton, with a tinge of red showing quickly in his cheeks.

"What do you know——" but a disturbance at the end of the corridor suddenly clipped Keene's inquiry.

He turned at once and saw that the medical examiner had arrived, accompanied by two policemen, and with a wave of his hand and a slight bow of acknowledgment, the detective signified to Burton that his inquiry was ended.

Ten minutes later, Keene slipped out among the crowd and winked for Wagner to follow him aside, with whom he conversed for a quarter-hour or more. At the end of that time he retraced his steps to the headquarters building in Pemberton Square, where he presently made his official report of the case to Chief Inspector Watts.

CHAPTER VI.

"THERE IS A WAY, CHIEF WATTS."

"In the light of the bare facts as stated to me, Detective Keene, what do you make of this case, from personal observation of the scene and of the several men?"

This was the question asked by Chief Inspector Watts, at the conclusion of the report made by Sheridan Keene.

It was nearly noon of the same day. The medical examiner had, long ere this, viewed the remains of the deceased; the body of Captain Cavendish had been removed to the room of an undertaker, there to lie pending further investigation by the detectives, and to await an autopsy should the case seem to require it.

Keene and Chief Watts were alone in the latter's private office. On a newspaper lying on the chief's desk was the small vial found by the detective on the floor of the store-room. It now was empty, the contents having thawed and leaked through the cracked glass, and all that remained of the dark fluid were the stains coloring the handkerchief of the detective. It no longer was a frozen clew; yet the vial and label still were left to work from.

Sheridan Keene drew himself up in his chair, and sat silent for a moment before replying to the chief's question.

"There are three theories which chiefly appeal to me, sir," he at length said, earnestly; "and I am satisfied that the case is one requiring careful investigation."

"What are your three theories, Detective Keene, and the basis for them?" gravely inquired the chief.

"I will state them in the order of least probability, Chief Watts," Keene thoughtfully rejoined. "The first relates to Frank Burton. My observations of this man are favorable, and I find it difficult to believe him guilty of having, even upon impulse, attempted the life of Captain Cavendish by locking him in the store-room. The man has a good reputation, and his bearing when I questioned him appeared to be that of innocence."

"Yet the evidence against him seems to be rather unfavorable."

"That is true, Chief Watts," nodded Keene. "He may, indeed, have lied to me. He may, as a matter of fact, never have left the store-room with Cavendish, as he stated; and he very possibly may have ended their dispute by abruptly withdrawing from the room alone, and securing the door after him."

"That could very easily have been done, I think."

"The subsequent conduct of Burton hard-

ly sustains such a belief, however," continued Keene. "I have learned that he at once returned to the office, which is on the street floor of the building, and did not leave there until he went home an hour later. Under the circumstances, that would have been very remarkable. Knowing Cavendish to have been locked in the room, and that by his release he would be seriously incriminated, Burton naturally would have remained near the room, or at least have returned to the corridor once or twice, to make sure no one was sufficiently near to be attracted by any disturbance which Cavendish might have been able to make."

"That is a point well taken," admitted Chief Watts, gravely.

"I should think less of it, chief, were there any marks of personal violence on the body of Cavendish, indicating that he was unconscious when left in the room, and hence not likely to have tried to attract attention from outside. If unconscious, the man would have frozen in a very short time. I learned, further, that Burton is in love with the daughter of Cavendish, and means to marry her. It seems, even less likely, then, that he would have taken the life of her father, even though the latter had vigorously opposed his suit."

"That, also, is very reasonable."

"In order to be near the girl," continued Keene, "I learn that Burton has recently given up pleasant rooms up town, and taken a room in the North Hotel, which is rather an inferior lodging-house, with a noisy saloon occupying the ground floor. This appears to have been the act of a man whose protestations of affection were genuine; and, as I have said, I find it difficult to think that Burton is guilty of this crime, despite the incriminating circumstances by which he appears to be involved."

"What other theory have you formed?"

"That Cavendish may possibly have been locked in the room by accident, Chief Watts," Keene gravely replied. "He may have returned to the room after Burton departed, and it is barely possible that some employee of the Atlas company, seeing the door of the room open, closed and secured it. I am unable to find that any man did so, however; yet there may be such a man, and he now may fear to face the truth lest he incur punishment for criminal negligence."

"Have you seen the man who had charge of the store-room yesterday afternoon?"

"I have had a talk with him, chief. I went to his home at the West End before coming here. His name is Morton. He states that he did not find the door of the fish-room open when he went there, after the altercation between the two men, and of which he claims to have known nothing, being in another part of the building at the time."

"At what time did he go on duty?"

"At four o'clock in the afternoon, and worked until midnight," Keene replied. "He states that he visited the fish-room about half-past four, which was prior to the visit of Burton and Cavendish; and that he did not again go to that part of the building until about half-past six. In that interval Cavendish easily might have frozen. On learning of his death, Morton exhibited great surprise, and appeared honest in his protestations of complete ignorance of the affair. So much for that theory, Chief Watts."

"I am not inclined to give it much credence," said the chief, gravely. "If Cavendish had been accidentally locked in the room by an employee, who had no malice in the action, it seems to me that the seaman would have succeeded in attracting the attention of the employee before the latter

could have left the corridor. It is true that Cavendish may have returned to the room to look over his fish; but I think that any employee who found the door open would, before closing it, have made sure that there was no person within."

"I am rather inclined to think that, Chief Watts."

"What is your other theory?"

"It relates to the man named Wagner, and I think it is the most probable of the three," said Keene, with greater earnestness.

"State it, please."

"I quietly learned that Wagner has been living for a year or more at the North Hotel, and that he also has had aspirations to the love of Mary Cavendish."

"Likewise opposed by her father?"

"Very decidedly, chief! Cavendish, who was away fishing much of the time, was exceedingly strict with the girl, and would allow no man to pay more than cursory attention to her. Very likely he is not much to be blamed, for the girl is only about nineteen years old, and is said to be very pretty. Be that as it may, chief, there are the facts."

"I infer, Keene, that you suspect some jealousy to exist between Wagner and Burton," observed Chief Watts, in his gravely attentive way.

"On the part of Wagner at least," Keene quickly replied.

"What were your special observations of that man?"

"They were decidedly unfavorable!" exclaimed the detective. "I think it is quite probable that his may have been the hand that locked Cavendish in the store-room."

"If the seaman returned to the room after Burton's departure, Wagner, who was near by, would have had an opportunity to secure the door unobserved, and which he may have done in the hope of incriminating Frank Burton."

"Ah, this seems much more likely!" exclaimed Chief Watts. "What more of Wagner?"

"He states that he was fixing the elevator drum at the time of the altercation, and was led to come down to the corridor with the intention of interposing between the two men. He says he did not do so, however, but returned to his work. Now, chief, assuming that Burton had, indeed, locked Cavendish in the room, it seems to me that this engineer should also have heard the sounds made by Cavendish when he beat upon the wall. At least a sufficient noise should have been made to have attracted his attention. I've yet to investigate that matter more thoroughly, Chief Watts."

"Do so, by all means, Keene."

"I learn, however," continued Keene, "that Wagner returned to the engine-room about half-past five, which also was but a few minutes subsequent to the altercation. The conclusions drawn in the case of Burton, therefore, are equally applicable to the case of Wagner. He, too, it would seem, should have been led to hang about the corridor long enough to insure that Cavendish was not discovered. To that extent, the circumstances are surely in Wagner's favor, if they may be considered favorable to Burton."

"That is true enough," nodded Chief Watts. "Go on, however."

"But the balance is still less in Wagner's favor," continued Sheridan Keene. "In talking with this man, I observed that he was unconsciously betraying considerable eagerness to influence me to a certain way of thinking, as if secretly anxious that I should adopt a theory tending to involve Burton in the crime. I gave Wagner all the line he wanted in this direction, and I am quite certain that I am right in my inference."

"A very good idea, Detective Keene," bowed Chief Watts, approvingly. "What more do you make of this?"

"I took occasion at one time to see if I could further the belief I had formed," Keene continued. "I carelessly laid my hand on the man's shoulder, and I discovered that he was trembling violently, as if with suppressed excitement or eagerness."

"Capital!"

"Yet that may have been occasioned partly by the cold, Chief Watts; but not entirely, I am sure," Keene went on to explain. "I then took the course which appealed strongest to me, that of giving Wagner the assurance which he evidently wished to acquire; namely, that I was forming a pronounced suspicion of Burton. He now believes that I am quite convinced of the latter's guilt, and am resolved to drive him to the wall. This artifice will enable me, I think, to make Wagner, if he is the guilty party, a tool for his own conviction."

"You are working up the investigation admirably, Keene!" exclaimed Chief Watts, approvingly. "Go on with your analysis, and we will presently decide what move may best be made to discover the truth in the case."

Keene colored slightly at these expressions of commendation, but merely bowed his appreciation.

"I find," he continued, "that Burton encountered no person on the stairs, when he was returning to the office. It was a time of day when most of the employees were preparing to go home, and when that upper floor and corridor were very likely to be deserted until morning, except by the one man whose duty takes him to the fish-room occasionally. Wagner would have known this, and possibly took advantage of it, believing the crime would not be discovered in time to release the seaman. On the whole, Chief Watts, while the crime was in that case very artfully committed, and offers very little absolute evidence against Wagner, I fully be-

lieve that the engineer knows much more than he has told."

"You judge also from your observations of the man, I take it?" inquired Chief Watts, who had abiding faith in Keene's ability to read men's character.

"Decidedly so!" exclaimed the detective. "He strikes me as an evil and treacherous fellow. Now, chief, concerning the vial I found on the floor. It appears to be a bottle of medicine, and the date on the label shows that it was purchased yesterday."

"So I observe."

"Evidently the vial dropped from the pocket of some person who was in the store-room later than yesterday morning, and who did not miss it at the time," Keene continued. "I find that only the young man who regulates the temperature visited that room prior to the visit of Burton and the seaman. The vial may have fallen from the pocket of Cavendish himself, while he was beating upon the wall with the frozen fish, for I found it quite near them on the floor."

"Very possibly that was the case, then."

"If it did not belong to Cavendish, however, it is a very promising clue to the identity of some person who visited the store-room after the crime was committed."

"But not necessarily so," observed Chief Watts.

"May it not have belonged to Burton?"

"It is possible, Chief Watts, but not probable," replied Keene. "For, by Burton's own testimony, and that of Wagner, who states that he saw him when in the room with Cavendish, Burton was not very near the spot where I found the vial."

"That is quite important, then. As a matter of fact, we should be able to learn who purchased the medicine, if we can locate the druggist who sold it."

"I have that in mind, also, chief."

"I infer that you have already thought of

a way by which this crime can be placed where it belongs," said Chief Watts, smiling at the profound earnestness of his subordinate. "Am I right?"

"Yes, chief, you are right!" Keene quickly exclaimed. "There is a way which I think it may be done. And your question leads me to a side theory, so to speak, of which there is some little evidence, and to which I've given some little consideration."

"Well, Detective Keene, what is your side theory?" laughed Chief Watts. "If it is as clever as you third, that regarding Wagner, we shall be rather set upon a fence."

"Fortunately, chief," smiled the detective; "my side theory also includes and involves Mr. John Wagner, who, I think, seriously requires our attention in some very cunning and skillful way. I will tell you of what the evidence consists, Chief Watts, and with your permission will submit a plan which I think may be worked to advantage."

"Let's have it, Keene, by all means!"

And Sheridan Keene drew his chair nearer, and proceeded to elucidate what he had been pleased to term—his side theory.

CHAPTER VII.

SHERIDAN KEENE BOARDS THE MOLLIE.

The beginning of a startling sequence of events, resulting from the conference between Inspector Watts and Sheridan Keene, occurred immediately after noon that day. Taking from his desk in the inspector's room a few articles for preparing an effective disguise, the detective left the headquarters building and went at once to the water front. There, after a few inquiries among the long-shoremen thronging Atlantic avenue, he succeeded in locating the fishing schooner *Mollie*, hauled well into the dock adjoining Long Wharf.

She was about the cut of craft that he had expected to find; a faded black schooner of small tonnage, strong with the odor of fish, and as dirty as well can be imagined. Evidently the fate befallen her owner was known aboard, for she had been hauled up next to the wharf, and lay with her sails furled, her hatch down, and a ragged flag drooping mournfully at halfmast.

Her forecastle was deserted; but Keene observed, seated aft on the wheel-gear, the man evidently then in charge of the vessel. He was a middle-aged man, roughly clad in a seaman's garb, and with a countenance and general aspect well in keeping with the craft herself.

He looked up indifferently when Keene sprang down to the rail and came aboard, and vouchsafed only a nod when the detective walked aft and bade him good-day.

"Are you the man in care of this vessel, sir, since the death of Captain Cavendish?" the detective then asked, courteously.

"I guess so, matie, sence the cap'n's gone by the board," replied the seaman with a voice as hoarse as if the gales of a decade had blown his vocal organs into a state of utter laxity. "I am the mate o' the vessel. Be you a reporter? There ain't been no less'n seven of ye aboard sence the cap'n croaked. Ye're wuss'n a crew o' pirates."

Keene laughed lightly, and discovered that the man was less repellent than he looked.

"No, I am not a reporter," he replied, in his genial way. "I am a detective, detailed by Chief Inspector Watts to investigate the circumstances involving the death of Captain Cavendish. We are not quite sure that he was not the victim of foul play, and I've come aboard to ask you to do me a little favor."

Though he gave but a glance at the badge the detective displayed, the seaman's eyes brightened noticeably. He quickly arose, saying heartily:

"Fore heaven, matie, I've thought the same thing myself. Ole Cap'n Cavendish wasn't a man to be caught in the hold with hatches down unless suthin' was wrong above board. Do ye a turn, eh? Ay, ay, I will, in that case, so be it I can. What might it be, matie?"

"First tell me your name, if you please?"

"My name is Jenkins."

"And mine is Keene," rejoined the detective, affably.

"Now, Mr. Jenkins," he continued, "how well are you known at the North Hotel, where Captain Cavendish was in the habit of lodging when ashore?"

"Ain't known at all," cried Jenkins, tersely. "I allus bunk aboard ship, sir, and as I've no habit of crookin' my elbow, I've had little use for the North Hotel."

"Was Captain Cavendish addicted to liquor?"

"Summut, sir."

"Does his daughter know you by sight, or any of the people who frequent the hotel?"

"I guess not, matie. I never was in there; and as for the Cap'n's lass, he'd never have her aboard this dirty craft, for all she was named for her."

"This suits me admirably, Mr. Jenkins," Keene now explained. "The object I've in view is this. I suspect a man who lodges at the North Hotel of being guilty of a rather ugly piece of work. I am out to get the truth, if possible, and take the fellow into camp. I wish to visit the hotel for a day or two, and give the impression that I am one of this vessel's crew—the mate, for example."

"D'ye think you look like me?" demanded Jenkins, with an amused grin.

"No, you're better looking," laughed Keene. "You say you are not known at the North Hotel, however, and I easily can pass myself off for a fisherman, if not for the mate of the *Mollie*, providing you will loan me suitable garments, in security for which I will leave you these I am wearing. I've clothes that would serve for a common seaman, but a fisherman must needs smell of fish, you know. I want to borrow a few things that will serve that end, and if you will accommodate me, and keep mum over the whole business, I'll make it worth your while."

"Ay, ay, sir, I will!" exclaimed Jenkins, not slow to grasp the idea. "And I will keep as dumb as an oyster, nor will I take anything for the sarvice. Come below, sir; and I will fit ye out from keel to truck to ye own fancy. I'd do that much for the ole man, matie, who'd a better heart'n he had tongue, which ain't sayin' much to his credit, nuther. Come below, sir."

Keene followed the fisherman down the companion way and into a dingy, foul-smelling cabin, where he was given an as-

sortment of equally odorous garments from which to choose. He made a selection, then he set about making certain facial changes, a process which Jenkins watched with wide and astonished eyes.

"What was the matter with Captain Cavendish?" Keene casually asked, while thus engaged.

"Matter with him, matie?"

"Was he in the habit of taking medicine?" asked Keene, without turning from a wavy mirror which he had found available on the cabin wall.

"Medicine, eh? 'Fore heaven, matie, I never knew him to take but one kind of medicine. He took enough of that to float the *Mollie*, so be it 'twas in one basin."

"What was that?" asked Keene.

"Rum and molasses, sir."

"He enjoyed pretty good health, then, I take it?"

"Pretty good, eh!" exclaimed Mr. Jenkins, with a laugh as dry as a smoked herring. "Why, matie, I'd a swore a oath the ole man 'ud lived to be a hun'ard. He was tougher'n a oak cap'sn-bar, and as good on his feed as a hog i' the autumn. I often wondered where he stowed the cargo o' grub I've watched him get outside of."

"A heavy eater, eh?"

"Ay, ay, sir, he was."

"How will that do?" asked Keene, now swinging around from the mirror and looking the fisherman in the face.

Jenkins burst into a laugh of intense enjoyment.

"'Fore heaven, matie, your own muther'd not know you," he cried, staring with ludicrous gaze at the changed face of the clever detective. "I'd swear you'd been a fisherman all the days o' ye life. Along with these ere togs, and the smell o' cod and haddock, the ole man himself would a signed you. Blowed if ye don't look more like me'n ye did, matie, which ain't much in ye favor."

Keene joined in the seaman's laughter, and now hastened to change his own garments for those he had selected, meantime giving Mr. Jenkins such cursory directions against disclosing this strategy as the case seemed to require. The man who issued from the cabin of the *Mollie* a little later,

and presently threaded his way among the stevedores and longshoremen on the wharf, in no respect resembled the clean-cut officer who had boarded the fisherman's craft a half-hour before.

His face now wore the rough traces of service in wind and weather. His unkempt hair had grown an inch or more, and was covered with a slouchy tarpaulin, drawn low over his keen dark eyes. He wore a coarse gray shirt, a heavy reefer of faded blue, and a pair of soiled trousers, stuck here and there with dry fish scales, and which were tucked into a pair of long rubber boots strapped midway about his thighs.

There was, moreover, a slouch to his shoulders, and roll to his gait, and a habit of hitching up his baggy trousers higher on his hips, all eminently in keeping with the character Sheridan Keene had assumed.

He did not shape a course for the North Hotel, however, as he had intimated to Mr. Jenkins. Bearing off through Commercial and Market streets, he lay a course as direct as possible for the building occupied by the Atlas Cold Storage.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST MATE OF THE MOLLIE.

Instead of entering the office of the cold storage company, Sheridan Keene hugged the building in passing the windows, and dodged suddenly into a narrow passage making to the side elevator and stairs. He did not fear recognition by any person he might encounter, but was anxious only that a man of his appearance might not be observed just then by the one against whom his operations were chiefly directed.

Mounting the stairs till he reached the third floor, he loitered about one of the side corridors until, from some quarter below, he heard the voice of the party he then was seeking. This was the young man named Weaver, whose duty of that day did not end until four o'clock. After considerable dodging about, the detective finally located him on the second floor, going his round of rooms for the last time.

Keene cornered him in one of the corri-

dors, as he was about taking the elevator, and at once detained him.

"Belay a bit, my hearty!" he exclaimed. "I've lost my bearings in these ere crooks and turns about here. Can you pilot me out?"

Weaver had started with some surprise upon beholding him, and the sight of another seaman, after the dismal tragedy of that morning, was not wholly agreeable.

"What are you doing here, anyway?" he demanded, curtly. "Strangers are not allowed in here without a permit from the office."

"Steer me down there, then, and I'll get one," growled Keene. "I'm not here without business, messmate. I'm the mate of the schooner *Mollie*, whose cap'n was found dead here this morning."

"Oh, all right then!" exclaimed Weaver. "I didn't know that. Take the elevator with me, and I'll show you the way to the office."

"Heave ahead, me laddie."

"Too bad about Cavendish, wasn't it?"

"Ay, ay, it was," nodded Keene, as he boarded the elevator.

Then, as Weaver seized the line to start the car, the detective laid a hand on his arm, and added softly:

"Let her go up, my lad, instead of down!"

"What do you mean?" gasped Weaver, startled by the expression in Keene's dark eyes.

"Run her up, lad, and I'll tell you. I want to go to the room where Cavendish died. I say, messmate," he added, when Weaver demurred; "you've an honest face and a good block on your shoulders. Can you keep a secret?"

"I can if need be," said Weaver, rather shortly. "At what are you driving?"

"This—let me whisper it in your ear!"

Keene bent nearer, and Weaver suddenly drew back, staring the detective in the face.

"Goodness!" he muttered, smiling, "I'd never have known you!"

"Take me up to the fish-room, and I'll tell you why I am here," said Keene, softly.

Weaver no longer hesitated, and presently the two men gained the corridor and the room desired. Both were deserted, and

Keene at once explained the object of his visit.

"I am going to trust to your discretion, Weaver, and inform you of my suspicions," he said, closing the door of the room into which, despite the cold, the detective had signed for his companion to enter. "I want you to say nothing about the matter, however, until after I've ended my investigations."

"I certainly will not, sir," said Weaver, readily.

"Your face assures me of that," nodded Keene. "The fact is, Weaver, I suspect this man Wagner of not being all above board. I don't think he has told the whole truth, and I mean to force him to do so. Do you know where he is at present?"

"He was down in the engine-room a few minutes ago, sir."

"How long before you go off duty?"

"In about an hour."

"Before then, there are two things I wish to accomplish, and in one at least I shall require your help. Above all things, however, do not betray in the presence of Wagner, or any third party, that you are informed of my identity. The least sign might give it away, you know."

"Don't fear that I will give it away, Detective Keene," Weaver quickly answered. "I am far too anxious to see Burton well out of this scrape to betray you by word or sign. You tell me what you wish me to do, and I will do it."

"Very good!" exclaimed Keene. "To begin with, I want you to let me lock you in this room; and, after I've had time to reach the elevator and go up to the top of the shaft, I want you to beat on the wall here with one of these fish, say a half-dozen times, as forcibly as you are able. I wish to discover whether the sound can be heard from where Wagner claims to have been, when Cavendish was first locked in the room."

"I understand, sir."

"Let's be at it before we are interrupted."

"There is not much danger of that, sir," replied Weaver; "but I'm ready if you are."

"Get one of the fish, then, and get a heavy one. Give me half a minute in which to reach the elevator, and then bang hard. Not

more than five or six strokes, mind you. I will secure the door, that the conditions may be the same."

"All right, sir. Wait a bit till I get my position, for it will be darker'n the devil in here after you close the door. Now go ahead!"

Keene closed and locked the heavy door when he passed out. Then he hastened to the elevator, and ran the car to the top of the shaft, which brought him within a few yards of the gear overhead. He waited in silence for a moment, and then there plainly sounded on his ears the dull thud of the heavy blows dealt by the man in the fish-room.

"About what I expected," muttered Keene, springing down to the car. "Wagner lied like a pirate! Cavendish never struck a blow, after that door was closed upon him for the last time."

Quickly rejoining Weaver, the detective told him the result of the experiment, and again cautioned him against making any disclosures.

"There is one more thing in which I may require your help," he then explained. "Has Wagner any right to enter this room, or do you have entire charge of it?"

"Ordinarily, sir, the men are not allowed in the rooms, except when transferring stores," explained Weaver. "With Wagner, sir, it is rather different. His duty requires him to see that the pipes are in proper condition, and he frequently visits the rooms."

"That is all right, then!" exclaimed Keene. "In that case I shall not need you, and you'd better keep out of sight. I can easily make Wagner volunteer to come up here with me."

"How so, sir?"

Keene laughed.

"Don't you know that a guilty conscience will drive a man to almost anything?" he rejoined. "Now wait one moment while I prepare for him."

Weaver could not see what the detective did; he merely saw him stoop to the floor at one of the great bins of loose fish, those belonging to Cavendish, and quite near the spot where the seaman's body had been found. Then Keene suddenly rose erect, and said shortly:

"Now we're ready, Mr. Weaver. Be off about your own business, and leave Mr. Wagner to me."

Keene's next appearance in the case was in a corridor overlooking the engine-room, in the basement of the building, where he stood about for several minutes, staring this way and that, like a man doubtful which way to turn. That which presently occurred was precisely what he expected.

As if the presence there of another fisherman had instantly quickened his suspicions, Wagner came bolting up from the engine-room the moment he beheld him, and quickly reached the corridor in which Keene was standing. He came through a door somewhat removed from the detective, and the latter at once hastened to meet him, as if glad to have run upon some person from whom he could obtain information.

"Beggee pardon, messmate!" he cried, hitching up his belt with one hand, and giving his tarpaulin a jerk with the other. "Can't you set a covey right who's dead at sea in this 'ere building? Which way'll I bear to find the office?"

A mingling of distrust and apprehension was plainly manifest in Wagner's frowning eyes. Despite the searching scrutiny to which he was subjected, however, the detective felt sure of his disguise, and that the engineer's misgivings were rooted in some secret dread of his own.

For this reason, too, Keene was sure that Wagner would himself comply with the request he was about to make, rather than endure any uncertainty as to the true nature of his mission there, by turning him over to the guidance of a third party.

In response to the question asked by Sheridan Keene, the engineer quickly demanded:

"Who are you? And what are you doing here?"

"I'm the mate o' the *Mollie*, late Cap'n Cavendish, who was found dead here this morning," Keene glibly rejoined, with enough of a seaman's vernacular to sustain the character assumed.

"The mate of the *Mollie*, are you?"

"Ay, ay, sir, I am," nodded the detective. "But I'm not lookin' arter Cavendish, far

from it, messmate! I only want to find the room where the old man's fish are stored."

"What do you want in that room?" demanded Wagner, whose suspicions were not easily allayed.

"Just to see how they run in weight, sir, and what part o' them are blues," Keene readily explained.

"But for what reason, my man?"

"You see, sir, the cap'n sold a half a ton, or nigh that, only yesterday. Some on 'em must be delivered afore Saturday, and I want to larn what's got to be took from here, to make up what I've got aboard the vessel."

"Why didn't you call at the office?"

"I meant to ha' done so, messmate," replied Keene, who was by no means an easy man to corner; "but I missed the door, and shaped my course in here, and now I'm at dead reckoning."

"Well, I guess you are all right," Wagner now observed, less censoriously.

"If you'll show me the way to the office, I'll get the consent——"

"What do you wish to do in the room—merely look over the fish?" interrupted Wagner, thoroughly hoodwinked by Keene's plausible story, and the artful fluency with which it was told.

"Ay, ay, matie, that's all."

"You don't wish to remove any?"

"Not afore Saturday, sir."

"You will need a permit to do that."

"Ay, sir, so the cap'n told me afore this. Just now I only want to clap my peepers on the size o' the fish, and the different kinds. I'll heave no 'one to for long in doing that, sir."

"I will show you the room, then," said Wagner, now drawn into the net. "Come out this way."

"Heave ahead, sir!"

And with a roll and a swagger Keene fell in at the heels of the engineer, who now led the way to the elevator, on which they started for the fifth floor.

"This 'ere beats runnin' up ratlines in a gale o' wind and an ugly sea!" laughed Keene, referring to their easy ascent. "'Tain't much like climbing aloft on ship-board."

"I suppose not," growled Wagner, with

a furtive glance at his companion's swarthy face. "Come this way."

"So this 'ere was where they found him, eh?" observed Keene, when they entered the icy store-room.

"Yes, this is where they found him."

"'Fore heaven, matie, I'd never ha' dreamed he'd come to an end like that."

"The end of all of us is uncertain."

"Avast a bit, matie!"

"What now?"

"I say, sir! Where was he lying?"

"Never mind where he was lying!" forcibly rejoined Wagner, who found the remarks distasteful, and whose face had grown quite pale. "Do you think I, too, want to freeze here? Look over your fish, if you like, and then get out!"

"Ay, ay, sir! Beggee pardon, sir!" Keene now exclaimed, humbly twiggling his tarpaulin. "I meant no harm, matie; my word for it. I was only wondering where the old man——"

"Get at your work!"

"Ay, ay, sir! This 'ere was the old man's bin, I know by the fish. Steady, matie, and lay to a bit. I'll not be long about it."

While Wagner watched him with steadfast gaze, the detective clambered into the bin of frozen fish, hauling over a few here and there, and apparently estimating with experienced eyes the quantity and quality of each variety.

Then he clambered out again, and fell to sorting those which had slid out from the bin, like so many chunks of icy wood, pitching one here and tossing one there, and now and then accompanying his movements with a remark to which Wagner appeared to give no weight, if, indeed, attention.

Presently, however, Keene growled out, with grim disapproval:

"What's this 'ere? Glass 'mongst the fish! A devil of a place for that to be knocking about!"

And without a backward glance, and with no apparent interest in Wagner, he flirted across the floor the empty vial he had found that morning.

The engineer pounced upon it like a terrier on a rat.

That the cork was missing, seemed in-

stantly to explain why the bottle was empty, and a gleam of intense satisfaction fired the man's crafty and treacherous eyes.

Yet his involuntary eagerness had been so obvious that his companion, of whom Wagner really had no considerable suspicion, quickly started up and looked to see what the object might be.

"It's nothing!" exclaimed Wagner, recoiling slightly, when Keene so abruptly approached him.

"What was it, matie?"

"Only an empty bottle."

"Let's see it! Let's see it, matie!" persisted Keene. "If it's only an empty bottle, what need to stow it away in your hand. Let's see it, I say!"

"There 'tis! See for yourself!" cried Wagner, frowning darkly.

"Ay, ay, matie, that's right!"

"It belongs to me, as far as that goes! And there's the mate to it, only it's full. It's some medicine I'm taking."

And the poor wretch, artfully made the tool for his own undoing, in his eagerness to quell any misgivings on the part of this ostensible seaman, drew from his vest pocket a similar vial, which he had purchased since losing the other, and displayed them both in the palm of his tremulous hand.

"Ay, ay, that's all right, matie!" Keene repeated, heartily, with a wave of his hand. "I only thought it might ha' been suthin' the old man had dropped. Keep 'em, matie! I've no use for 'em!"

And Sheridan Keene turned back to his work at the bin, yet viewed askance, and with secret satisfaction, the disposal of both vials in the pocket of the engineer.

"That beats hunting up a druggist for the purpose of fixing the dog's identity!" the detective said to himself, as he concluded his work at the edge of the bin.

"Now then, matie, I'm ready to be off!" he said, rising at the end of five minutes, and rubbing the ice and fish scales from his hands.

"Got all through?"

"Ay, ay, matie, and many thanks for the service."

"You needn't feel that way about it. We'll go down as we came."

"Shall I heave ahead, sir?"

"Yes, go on! It's too cold to stand about in here."

"So 'tis, sir, for a fact," cried Keene; then he turned back from the open door to add, with a rather grim smile:

"The old man would ha' kept for many a day, matie, had they let him lie where they found him!"

"That's enough of that!" replied Wagner, yet he now showed no resentment. "Go on with you! I've work to do below."

"All right, sir! Beggee pardon! beggee pardon a thousand times!"

And Sheridan Keene hitched up his trousers higher on his hips, and with a roll and a swagger that might have been those of a genuine old salt, turned his steps in the direction of the corridor, that morning the scene of an inquiry which led to these very moves.

Wagner closed and secured the door after they had passed out, and signed for his companion to go in the direction of the elevator, with which the latter readily complied.

The secret satisfaction of the engineer in the recovery of the vial was greater than he could easily hide, and it at once betrayed that he had feared some trouble from it.

His relief showed in his face, which had now lost its grim distrust of his companion. It sounded in his voice, and appeared in the more genial and friendly manner with which he responded to Sheridan Keene's remarks as they descended to the street floor.

It was, indeed, as if he felt that this fisherman had really done him a material favor when he discovered it at the edge of the bin containing the dead man's frozen fish, and brushed it out where he could lay hands upon it.

So pronounced were these feelings, in fact, that, having escorted Sheridan Keene to the street door, Wagner heartily shook hands with him in parting, and said he hoped they soon might meet again.

Keene did not tell him that he felt quite sure they would.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ARREST IN THE NORTH HOTEL.

Sheridan Keene's investigation of the mystery of the cold storage, and the death of Captain Peleg Cavendish, culminated sooner even than he had at first expected—no later, in fact, than that very evening.

The North Hotel, day or evening, was not a place that the cultured and refined would consider inviting. A beer saloon occupied one-half of the ground floor. The hotel office joined it, and was divided from it by a sheathed partition, with only a door between. From the office a stairway led to the floors above, where there was a parlor, so called, over the saloon, and some thirty or forty chambers between there and the roof.

It was a resort for seamen; the office was filled and noisy from morning until midnight; the saloon was a bedlam from the time its early morning patrons got fairly loaded up, until the hour of closing.

Yet it was in this house that Captain Cavendish had boarded his daughter, chiefly because the place was a favorite resort of his own. That the girl had grown to maturity as artless and innocent as a flower misplanted, reveals her inherent loftiness of character. She had taken it from her mother. It may be truthfully said that when her father died he did her the greatest service done since the day of her birth. Thereafter, in the love and care of a man like Burton, the life of Mary Cavendish was to be passed on a different plane.

At about seven o'clock that evening, Sheridan Keene, still in the uncouth garb of a fisherman, approached the North Hotel and entered the saloon. One of the first persons whom he encountered was John Wagner.

"Tip us your fin, matie, and shove your breast up here ag'in' the bar," he cried, heartily, shaking Wagner by the hand. "What'll it be?"

Though some surprise was pictured in his face, Wagner accepted the invitation of the detective, and mentioned his drink; then hastened to ask, under the impulse of vague misgivings:

"What has brought you here?"

Keene at once relieved him.

"The Cap'n's lass," he rejoined, tossing off his drink and wiping his lips on his sleeve. "I've not seen her since the old man went under, and I've come up to larn what she means to do about the *Mollie*. The craft can't lay hauled up at the wharf, and I reckon I'll take her off the gal's hands, if she'll let her go at the right figger."

"Buy her?" queried Wagner, now reassured.

"Ay, sir, so be it the lass'll take up my offer. I'll see you ag'in arter I've had my say with her," replied Keene, turning toward the office.

"All right, then: I'll be about here."

"By the way, matie," the detective turned back to say, with a lowered voice, "I'm told the lubber who did the Cap'n brown is to be nailed here to-night. But don't blow off your wind about it, messmate, for that's 'twixt you and me."

Again Wagner grew pale and faltered doubtfully:

"Whom do you mean?"

"I reckon his name's Barton, or Morton, or Burton, or suthin' like that," explained Keene, apparently oblivious to the other's perturbation.

"Frank Burton," said Wagner, with his expression changing instantly to that of a malicious triumph he could not easily hide. "Is the name Burton?"

"Ay, that's what 'tis."

"You're sure of it?"

"Sartin."

"But who informed you?"

"Some detective chap who boarded the *Mollie*, and pumped me dry about the Cap'n's habits. I reckon they've got the covey dead in the wind, from what he said, and 'll hook him for sure."

"What style of man was the detective?" demanded Wagner, with intense earnestness.

"A youngish man, matie, and as clean and trim as a cup defender."

"Dark eyes?"

"Ay, ay, sir, and as sharp as needles."

"'Twas Sheridan Keene, the detective."

"Like as not, though he didn't say so," Keene rejoined. "But avast, now! I'll go

aloft and see the lass, now, and 'll look you up ag'in arter I have had my say with her."

And without waiting for the question that was fairly trembling on Wagner's lips, Keene turned quickly away and disappeared through the door to the office. He now felt sure that Wagner, having been told that the arrest of Burton was imminent, would not leave the hotel before the arrest was made. With half an eye, one might have read that Wagner felt this arrest to be a morsel too sweet to be lost. He left the saloon and repaired to the office, where he loitered about with evil satisfaction, waiting and watching, and wishing that the inspectors would speedily appear. He was not, however, kept waiting long.

Meantime, Keene mounted the stairs and found, in the room adjoining the parlor, the girl he was seeking; or, rather, the man he knew he should find with her. He found the girl to be a delicate miss, with a pale, pretty face, and an abundance of hair about the color of gold. Her blue eyes were red from weeping, and Keene would have been less clever than he was had he not known that, in this hour of bereavement, he would find Burton in her company.

They were alone in the room; and he, of course, was not recognized by either.

"Beggee pardon, both!" he said, as he entered. "I reckon you're Miss Cavendish, ain't ye? I'm the mate o' the *Mollie*, miss; and, arter what's happened, you're the one to say what's to be done with the vessel. She can't lay hauled up at the wharf, my lass, or I'd not come here about her right now."

The girl looked appealingly at Burton, who was also uncertain how to adjust the matter, and Keene took occasion to add:

"If ye say so, miss, I can have her hauled round to one of the yards, where she can lay idle till wanted. Or if ye say for me to look arter her for a time, till you're better settled, and get what I can out o' her fer ye, I'll do that, miss."

"The latter will be the better plan, Mary," Burton advised. "It may show a profit, while the other necessarily incurs expense."

"You decide for me, Frank," said the girl, simply.

"I think, Mr.——"

"Jenkins, sir."

"How long have you been sailing with Captain Cavendish?"

"Nigh on ten years, sir," said Keene, who thought he might as well make it long enough while he was about it.

"Then Captain Cavendish certainly has found you reliable," smiled Burton, approvingly. "You may run the vessel upon your own judgment until otherwise instructed, Mr. Jenkins. When the estate of Captain Cavendish has been——"

"Is there a man named Frank Burton here?"

The interruption came in a deep tone from a portly man who had appeared on the threshold of the door. Burton started to his feet, and instantly recognized the imposing figure and grave face of—Chief Inspector Watts.

Peering in through a farther door of the parlor was the evil face and malicious eyes of Wagner, the engineer.

"I am Frank Burton," said the latter, controlling himself with an effort.

"I want to see you alone."

Without a word, Burton followed Chief Watts from the room.

"Give the other fifteen minutes," said Sheridan Keene, much as if he was talking aloud to himself; but his words reached the ears of the chief inspector.

Keene next closed quickly the door of the side room, and turned to the startled girl. She had risen from the chair and stood with her hands pressed above her heart, and her gaze turned in the direction whence her lover had departed, much as if she had received some previous intimation of the danger threatening him.

"Your friend has been arrested, Miss Cavendish," Keene said, quickly. "Hush, do not fear! No harm will befall him, but don't repeat that. Be sure you don't repeat that."

"But I don't understand——"

"Nor have I time to explain," said the detective, in low, forceful tones. "But you must do what I bid you. It is for Burton's sake, and I am an officer in disguise."

"For—his sake! Tell me—what shall I do?"

"Follow me to the other room, and re-

main there till I tell you that you may leave. I shall not remain, but you must. Do you understand?"

"Yes," the girl gasped, faintly.

"Do what I bid, then. Come!"

He led her to the adjoining room, leaving her alone there, and hastened down to the hotel office. Chief Watts had just departed with his prisoner, and Sheridan Keene quickly located Wagner near the office door.

"What did I tell you, matie?" he demanded, softly, as he paused at the latter's elbow.

Wagner turned quickly, and looked him in the face. His own was a picture of malicious triumph. His eyes were bright; his smile that of a treacherous knave; he was trembling visibly.

"You were right!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "I am glad of it. He'll now get his deserts."

"Ay, ay, he will," admitted Keene. "And they took him right 'fore the eyes of the lass, matie, who must ha' known why he——"

"Where'd ye leave her?" interrupted Wagner, with a start.

"In the room overhead, matie," said Keene, indifferently; then he turned, as if his interest had suddenly been taken by something out of doors.

Again that happened which he had anticipated. Wagner stole quickly away, and mounted the office stairs. Keene gave him time to reach the parlor, then held up five fingers to a man seated near the office desk, and immediately followed Wagner as far as the parlor door, near which he paused to listen. The latter had found the girl alone.

"Oh, yes, I am sorry for him," Wagner was saying in accents of vicious equivocation. "Don't I look it? Don't I speak as if I was? I told you, when you turned me down for him, that I'd get even with you both. Didn't I? Didn't I tell you so?"

But for the instructions given her by the detective, the pale and distressed girl, whom this knave was thus addressing with abusive taunts, would have left the room. As it was, she stood silent, with her glistening eyes fixed on the scoundrel's malicious face, and mutely suffered his vicious insolence.

"And he'll get all that's coming to him," he

continued, confronting the girl in the floor. "He'll swing, like as not, for the crime of murder. D'ye know what that means? Would ye like him to hang by the neck till he's dead? What would ye do to save him?"

"Don't come any nearer—don't," Keene heard the girl murmur, piteously.

"What would ye do for me, if you knew I could save him?" continued Wagner, ignoring her distress. "Would ye give yourself for him? Would ye turn him down, as you turned me, and take me up agin? Hark you, Mary Cavendish! But for me he'll swing! D'ye hear? Would ye give yourself to save him? If I can do it, would ye——"

Then the miscreant heard a heavy step on the entry stairs, and the voice of Sheridan Keene, saying loudly:

"Ay, ay, 'r, I reckon he's up here. Leastwise, I saw him bearing away in this direction. Ay, here he is, sir!"

And the detective strode into the room, followed closely by the man to whom he had made a sign in the office five minutes before. This man was Inspector Carey, who had come down with Chief Watts from headquarters.

"Is your name Wagner?" demanded the inspector, on entering.

Wagner turned quickly, and again began to tremble.

"Yes, that's my name, sir," he faltered.

"I am Detective Carey," explained the latter. "The chief wants you to come up to his office with me for a time, along with this seaman. We want to take your testimony against the man just arrested."

Again Wagner's fear was dispelled, and again his expression changed to that of evil satisfaction. That he was wanted for anything more became again a suppressed misgiving only, which he could not and would not credit.

"All right, sir," he said, readily; "I will go with you."

Keene lingered behind but an instant. He turned to the girl and whispered quickly, with his hand gently patting her arm:

"Expect Burton back here in an hour."

Miss Cavendish started slightly, then gave him a look he long remembered.

CHAPTER X.

CRUSHING EVIDENCE.

The final scene was in the chief inspector's office at headquarters. The curtains were closely drawn, the doors closed, the room brightly lighted.

The several men gathered there that evening comprised three inspectors, including Sheridan Keene and Chief Inspector Watts, with whom were Frank Burton and Wagner. They were seated in chairs about Chief Watts' desk, and Wagner occupied that directly confronting that of the chief.

He had looked curiously about in search of Sheridan Keene, when he first entered, but very naturally he had not succeeded in finding him.

Half an hour had already passed, an interval taken by the chief inspector for hearing Burton's story of the affair, which had been only a repetition of what he previously had told Sheridan Keene. This part of the proceedings was but an effective ruse by which to bring the details of the tragedy once more into strong relief, and to impress John Wagner with the solemnity of the moment. In this way the feelings and nerves of a man conscious of his own guilt may be strained to their utmost tension.

It was precisely eight o'clock when John Wagner was commanded by the chief to repeat his testimony. He told the same story he had told Keene, and, despite that his face was pale and his manner more or less disturbed, he commanded his emotions to a degree that would have ordinarily averted suspicion. His rehearsal of the affair occupied a quarter-hour, and then Chief Watts took him in hand.

"I am obliged to you, Wagner, for this information," he said, with dry austerity, as he drew up his portly and imposing figure higher in his chair. "But there are several features of this case, my man, and of your own story, as well as some parts of your personal conduct, which strike me as being decidedly peculiar."

"Peculiar, Chief Watts?" echoed Wagner, starting slightly, and nervously working his hands to and fro over his knees. "Why do you think my conduct peculiar in any way?"

"You have stated that you returned to your work in the elevator shaft yesterday afternoon, immediately after observing the scene between Burton and Cavendish in the store-room. Am I not right?"

"Yes, sir, you are right. That is precisely what I did."

"Now, how long did you say you remained at work there?"

"I don't know that I said, sir," Wagner evasively replied, instinctively putting himself on the defensive, now that the inquiry became so personal.

"You certainly must have some idea about it," cried Chief Watts, sternly.

"Yes, yes, sir, I have some idea! I might have remained there ten or fifteen minutes."

"Then you knew when the dispute between the two men ended, did you not?"

"Well, I'm not quite sure about that, sir."

"Hadn't you ceased to hear the sound of their voices before you quit work in the elevator shaft?" demanded the chief. "You have stated, previously, that you heard Burton go down-stairs about ten minutes before you did."

"Yes, sir; I know that. That is all true enough."

"Then, according to your own story, you continued at work there for about ten minutes after the dispute ended. What was the nature of the work that you was doing at the time?"

"I was setting some screws in part of the gear at the top of the shaft, sir."

"Did you have any occasion to use a hammer?"

"No, sir; I did not have one with me."

"How did it happen, then, since the dispute had ended and Burton had gone down-stairs, that you did not hear Cavendish knocking on the wall of the store-room?" Chief Watts now demanded, with greater sternness. "I have had one of my officers very carefully test this matter, and he finds—sit still, my man! You've no occasion to rise!"

Wagner had started, in fact, like a man about to jump from his chair.

"And my officer finds, Mr. Wagner, that such blows as Captain Cavendish presumably would have made, can very plainly be

heard from where you claim to have been at work."

"I don't know anything about that, Chief Watts," cried Wagner, who had turned very pale. "I know only that I did not hear them."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Wagner, do you really think that Cavendish dealt any such blows upon the wall as we have been led to suppose?"

"How—how can I tell?" gasped Wagner, looking as if he already felt himself being driven to the wall. "You know as well as I do of what the evidence consists, Chief Watts. I know only what I heard, and what I did not hear."

"Very evidently!" exclaimed Chief Watts, dryly. "Well, well, we will let that matter drop for a time. Now, Mr. Wagner, what do you think about the condition in which the body of Captain Cavendish was found? It was very cold in the room, was it not?"

"Yes, sir; it was very cold," faltered Wagner, with the hesitation of a man afraid to speak lest he should say something to his own disadvantage.

"Did you notice anything about the clothing of Captain Cavendish which struck you as being rather remarkable?" demanded Chief Watts, with his stern gaze never leaving Wagner's white face.

"No, sir, I don't think I did," was the tremulous reply.

"You did not?" exclaimed the chief. "What do you generally do when you are cold? Do you button your coat about you, or do you wear it open with your neck and throat exposed?"

"I—I wear it buttoned, Chief Watts."

"How did you happen to fail to notice that the clothing of Captain Cavendish, when found dead in the store-room, indicated that he had not done what all men invariably do when suffering from cold? His coat was entirely unbuttoned. Even his woolen shirt was open at the throat. A man might very reasonably have inferred that Captain Cavendish had been exceedingly warm just before he died, almost as if he had been stricken dead in the heat of his altercation with Burton. Didn't you notice any of this, John Wagner?"

The face of the man thus sternly and significantly addressed turned to the color of dead ashes, and he was shivering visibly from head to foot; yet he managed to answer, hoarsely, with his shrinking gaze never leaving the countenance of his questioner:

"No, I—I didn't notice! I—I know nothing about that."

"We have only your word for it, Mr. Wagner," returned Chief Watts, with augmented severity. "Now I want you to tell me, my man, why you were so anxious to enter that store-room before my officer arrived there yesterday morning?"

"I wasn't anxious to do so!"

"You were!" thundered Chief Watts.

"Your own words and actions betrayed you. What had you lost, that you feared might be found in the room where Captain Cavendish lay dead?"

"I had not lost anything."

"Are you sure of that?"

"My God, sir! you don't think I had anything to do with the killing of Captain Cavendish, do you?" Wagner now cried, forcibly, as men will do when driven to desperation.

"I asked you what you had lost!" cried Chief Watts, with terrible severity.

"Nothing that I knew of at the time!" groaned Wagner, flashing one swift glance of bitter hatred in the direction of Sheridan Keene. "Nothing that I knew of at the time!"

"Look in his upper vest pocket, chief, on the left side, and you will find what he lost!" Keene now observed sharply, speaking in his natural voice.

"Inspector Carey, search this man!" cried the chief.

But the ordeal to which John Wagner was being subjected was rapidly becoming more than he could endure. At the chief's command that he should be searched, following so quickly upon his observation of the altered tone and manner, the voice of the wretched man rose shrilly, crying:

"No, no, don't search me! There's no need of that! I'll tell you what it was! It was only a bottle—this that's empty! But I had not missed it then—I swear I had not! I must have lost it some days ago! It is medicine I'm taking for——"

"Stop right there, John Wagner!" commanded the chief, severely. "Give me the vial!"

With a hand that shook like an aspen leaf, Wagner gave the empty bottle to the speaker.

"When did you recover this?" demanded Chief Watts.

"This afternoon!" cried Wagner, desperately. "That fisherman found it near a bin of fish in the store-room. I must have lost it last week, or——"

"Stop again!" interrupted the chief. "That fisherman is Sheridan Keene, one of my officers, who has been noting your every movement."

"Oh, my God!"

"You say he found this near a bin of fish, John Wagner! You are wrong! He found it near the corpse of Captain Peleg Cavendish, on the morning the crime was discovered!"

"Chief Watts! Chief Watts——"

"Silence!" thundered the latter, now rising to his feet. "You say, John Wagner, that you purchased this a week ago! You lie! There is on the label a date which has escaped your eye, and which shows that it was purchased only yesterday! You dropped it in the store-room yourself, subsequent to the altercation between Burton and Cavendish! Now, sir, you are the man we want for this murder! You are the man guilty of——"

"No, no, Chief Watts!" and now John Wagner's shrill voice rose fairly to a shriek of despair and dismay. "Cavendish was not murdered! Hear me! I beg you to hear me! Cavendish was not murdered! He died in the corridor after Burton left him! I saw him fall dead! On my oath, on my oath, I state it!"

"Did you place his body in the store-room?"

"Yes, yes, I confess to that! I now confess to that!"

"And paved the way to involving Burton in the crime of murder?"

"Yes, yes! Oh, my God! I am caught in my own net!"

"Sit down in your chair!" Chief Watts now commanded sternly. "Sit down, I say!

Now tell me the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth! We know as well as you that Cavendish was not murdered! The examiner has reported a death from apoplexy."

Panting for breath, with his face ghastly, with his lips twitching convulsively, John Wagner heard the words that quelled the fear that had made his cowardice abject, and now he cast one horrified glance in the direction of Frank Burton.

"Send him away!" he gasped, faintly, shuddering through and through. "Send him away, and I will confess the whole truth!"

"You will confess it in that man's presence!" replied Chief Watts, with unabated severity. "It is fit that you should confess before the man you have aimed to ruin, if not to kill. Speak! Give us the whole truth!"

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

The evidence in this curious case, with its special significance, has already been so fully presented that a rehearsal of it hardly is required. The confession made that evening by John Wagner not only laid the miscreant liable to a severe punishment, which he duly received, but likewise cleared the few points about which there remained any uncertainty in the minds of Chief Watts and Sheridan Keene.

Wagner's part in the affair was one quite characteristic of the man. In the physical reaction following his heated controversy with Burton, and on emerging from the icy temperature of the store-room, Cavendish had indeed dropped dead to the corridor floor.

This fatality had been observed by Wagner only, who quickly took advantage of the strange circumstances to gratify his bitter antipathy for Burton. The method he had adopted, and the oversights which led Keene speedily to suspect somewhere near the actual truth, are already obvious.

Wagner's confession occupied less than a quarter-hour, and immediately thereafter he was sent to the Tombs to await arraignment the following morning. As he himself had said, he was indeed caught in his own net, and he had now to pay the penalty.

At nine o'clock that evening, in strict accordance with the promise given the girl by Sheridan Keene, Frank Burton was released from custody, and returned at once to Mary Cavendish.

So the case itself terminated then and there—but by no means the professional labors of the clever officers through whose efforts and skill the hidden truth had been unveiled.

THE END

Next week's SHIELD WEEKLY (No. 11) will contain a rattling good detective story entitled, "Under the Knife; or, The Cloak of Guilt."

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